

# Potential Health Care Savings Associated with Breastfeeding

## *Why do employers want to support breastfeeding employees?*

When a child is ill, everyone pays. Parents must often miss work to provide care. If they are at work, they are distracted and less productive. Breastfeeding plays a major role in protecting infants and children against a variety of illnesses and infections. Consequently, breastfeeding can also protect and improve the health of adult employees by decreasing their susceptibility to infectious disease. Consider the cost savings and enhanced productivity at work when children are breastfed.

## Determining the bottom line on children's illnesses ...

For each of the following diseases or illnesses, we have provided the average cost of care for each occurrence, the average number of days the child would be out of child care and thus the average number of days an employee could be absent.

### **Ear Infections**

By age three, one-third of all children have had more than three episodes of ear infections. In the U.S. ear infections cost more than \$1 billion annually in visits to the doctor. *Breastfed children have a 60% decrease in the occurrence of ear infections compared with formula fed children.*

**Estimated cost for each episode of an ear infection:**

**Office visit and treatment:**  
**\$90 - \$150**

**Days off for employee: 1-2**

Chronic ear infections may require surgery to implant ear tubes.

**Estimated cost for each episode of ear tube surgery:**

**Treatment:**  
**\$70-\$1800**

**Days off for employee: 2-3**

### **Allergies**

Proteins the infant is unable to digest often trigger food allergies. The child with a family history of respiratory or food allergies is at higher risk for a severe reaction due to an immature immune system. *Breastfed infants and children have a significantly lower risk for food allergies and other protein reactions. Breastmilk also protects the child from other respiratory allergies.*

**Estimated cost for each allergic child:**

**Allergy work-up and treatment:** **\$400-\$600**

**Days off for employee: 1-2**

## Bronchiolitis/Pneumonia

These conditions often start as mild respiratory infections and can sometimes be caused by a common respiratory tract virus called respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). As these infections spread to the lower respiratory tract they increase in severity, with fever and breathing difficulties. *Breastfed infants have an 80% decrease in risk for lower respiratory infections and a significant decrease in severity of RSV, with fewer hospitalizations.*

### Estimated cost for each episode of RSV:

**Treatment:**  
**\$60-\$195**

**Hospital room:**  
**\$800 - \$2000**

*\*Does not include diagnostic testing or treatment in hospital.*

**Days off for employee: 2-7**

*The data related to disease are based on a random survey by health care providers in Washington state. Adapted from "The Potential Health Care Cost of Not Breastfeeding," BEST START- Kentucky Resources.*

## References:

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*"My employer supported me bringing my baby to work when I first returned from maternity leave. She then supported me pumping at work. I'm glad I was able to do this. My employer knows it made me a more productive employee because my baby was hardly ever sick."*—Giselle, mother of 14-month-old Gloria



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